Remarks by the Honorable Ray Mabus
Secretary of the Navy
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SECRETARY RAY MABUS: Good afternoon. Just to pardon Carol Browner, to thank you for that wonderful introduction. Deputy Secretary Poneman, to all the familiar faces I see in the audience, I'm really happy to be here today to talk about energy reform to people who are so passionately interested in it and people who so wonderfully care and share about the president's vision of creating a new energy economy and a new energy future for this country.

I'm going to say something that is completely, obviously, absolutely self-evident: America relies too much on fossil fuels. That dependency degrades our national security. It affects our economy in negative ways and through carbon emissions and, we have learned, catastrophic spills, harms our planet.

Strategically, too much of our oil comes from volatile places on earth. We would not let some countries like Venezuela or Russia design and build our warships or our airplanes or our military. And yet we do give them a say on whether those ships will sail or whether those planes will fly – (inaudible, audio interference) – our energy from them.

That's the strategic level. At the tactical level, our dependence affects us as well. I've been in office 14 months. I've been able and honored to visit literally tens of thousands of Sailors and Marines around the world. I've had a hundred or more all hands calls on bases ranging from Okinawa to Afghanistan. And I've seen close up the evidence of our military's dependence on oil and our military's demand for power and the resulting impact on our people.

Getting a gallon of gasoline to a Marine at a forward operating base in Afghanistan is not easy. Every day, every day, young men and women guard the vulnerable fuel convoys as they move from the logistics hub to forward operating bases. Gasoline is the single thing we import most into Afghanistan.

And those convoys represent the last legs of a supply system that begins thousands of miles away. It goes through the coast of Pakistan, where ships offload fuel onto trucks, and then the slow journey all the way up and across the Hindu Kush into Afghanistan. It's dangerous. A lot of these convoys are hit with IEDs [Improvised Explosive Devices] or with ambushes, sometimes before they even get to Afghanistan.

The cost in people is significant. For every 24 convoys, we lose a Marine, a soldier, a Sailor or an airman: one in every 24 convoys. That is too high a price to pay for power. We have to change the way we use and produce energy. We not only will save lives in Afghanistan, we will also free up those Marines, soldiers, those Sailors, those airmen to do what they are there to do, which is to fight, to build, to engage.

As Carol Browner said seven weeks ago, I was honored when the president asked me to develop a plan for the long-term revitalization of the Gulf Coast because in the Gulf, over the last three months, we've seen another cost of energy infrastructure too dependent on oil. Since I've gotten this collateral duty, I've gone to the Gulf repeatedly on behalf of the president, talked to people and mainly listened to their ideas about how we can environmentally and economically restore the Gulf Coast, to make it better than it was the day before the well blew out.

I've seen for myself the impact of oil on marshes and beaches. I've seen the impact on fishing and tourism and I've seen the impact on an economy that's geared to fossil-fuel production with far too few alternatives. What affects the Gulf Coast affects the nation because so much of our energy is produced there. And the Gulf Coast, like the nation, relies way too much on fossil fuels.

But we have an amazing opportunity to change this. Over the next few years in the Gulf, we have the opportunity to create a showcase for alternative energy, to enact measures that can spur diverse investments, diverse economic development in the region, and move the Gulf Coast and our country toward a cleaner energy future and a cleaner energy economy.

The Navy and Marine Corps have a similar opportunity to lead the country toward a new energy future. That's why, in October 2009, I issued five energy targets for my department, the most important of which is, by 2020, one decade from now, half of all the energy we use – ashore and afloat, in the air, on the sea, under the sea and on land – will come from alternative sources.

We're already taking the first steps. This spring, we had a supersonic flight of an F/A-18 fighter, dubbed the Green Hornet: a 50/50 blend of biofuel and gas. This fall, we're going to move the testing of biofuel to our surface fleet. At Quantico, the Marines have built an expeditionary testing ground, a forward operating base, to look at new energy-efficient technologies.

Through Recovery Act funds and other funds that we've put to the purpose, we're making investments in solar and geothermal and waste energy projects. Across the country, we're working with universities and industries, states and other departments of the federal government, such as Energy and USDA, to advance research, development and, most importantly, fielding of these alternative fuels. With alternatives, the Navy and Marine Corps will improve the range and endurance of our ships and planes. We'll reduce our reliance to a vulnerable supply change and we'll create a resistance to the external shocks that comes from overreliance on a very fragile global oil infrastructure.

Our own history in the Navy shows that progress only comes when we think boldly. The Navy's always been a leader in adopting new technologies. In the middle of the 19th century we traded sail for coal. Forty years later, at the beginning of the 20th century, we went from coal to oil. And in the middle of the 20th century we added nuclear power to our fleet. Now all our carriers and submarines are nuclear powered.

In every single case, not missing one of those, there were people who said that a terrible mistake was being made, that we were trading one certain form of energy for one that was uncertain. We were trading an infrastructure – for example, in the case of coal, where we had coaling stations all around the world – for one that did not exist in large enough quantity to service the Navy. In nuclear, they said it was too untested, could not be made safe enough or small enough to fit into things like submarines.

Every single time they were wrong and they're going to be wrong this time too. Innovation made us better fighters. Innovation made us better services. Adding a new generation of biofuels to the fleet and solar and wind and geothermal and hydrothermal and wave action, is merely one more revolution, or evolution, in the way we generate and use power - the extension of an innovative spirit to a new century.

Energy reform and the new energy economy are not just talking points. It's not a political game. It means lives of our troops. It means making our military better fighters. It means making our country more independent.

I am incredibly grateful that this president has made the point very clearly and he's shown the foresight to look beyond the present, both in the Gulf and with energy reform, and that he has been such a forceful voice for change in this area. Because changing the way that energy is used and produced in our country, in our services, is the right thing to do. It's the right thing to do for our security. It's the right thing to do for our economy and it's the right thing to do for our environment. As the president said, we are choosing bold action over inaction.

For the Navy and Marine Corps, we're placing our faith in a 234-year history of meeting every mission, overcoming every challenge. America has done no less. Every generation of Americans has made our country great, from the founding of the republic to the creation of our industrial power to our journey to the moon. Every generation, our nation's capacity for innovation, our thirst for knowledge and our dedication to make a better world has defined what it means to be American. These same qualities can and will lead this generation to achieve greater energy security and true energy independence. That's a goal worth having. That's a goal worth striving for. That's a goal worth achieving. Thank you all.